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Improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

This report is submitted in response to requests of the General Assembly for reports on the working methods, functions, and productivity standards of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and on the efficiency, quality and delivery of conference services as well as other requests. It is presented in the context of the Secretary-General's comprehensive review of the work of the Organization. It also contains a note on workload standards (annex I) in compliance with a legislative request.

* A/57/150.

** This report was prepared in the context of the Secretary-General's comprehensive review of the work of the Organization, and its submission had to be deferred accordingly.

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Introduction

1. Within the context of Secretariat support to the intergovernmental process of the United Nations, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services makes a quiet but, nonetheless, essential contribution by providing meetings support, technical secretariats, interpretation and document processing. To carry out these functions, the Department disposes of resources which amount to 17 per cent of the current programme budget.

2. Member States expect the Department to perform impeccably and cost-effectively so that the intergovernmental machinery can, in turn, function smoothly, bearing in mind the significant portion of the budget that the Department accounts for. To a considerable extent, the Department has, in fact, functioned effectively. It is fortunate in having staff who are hard-working, technically proficient and dedicated to getting the job done. Yet a number of questions about aspects of the Department's performance were raised during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly and resulted in various legislative actions, including requests for a number of studies of the Department's operations.[1]

3. The comprehensive review of the work of the Organization called for by the Secretary-General thus provided a timely opportunity to launch a thorough examination of the Department with a view to improving its performance. A team of consultants was commissioned to provide expert and independent advice. The consultants were encouraged to go about their task in an open and transparent manner. They conducted extensive interviews with staff and delegates and set up an interactive web site to report on the progress of their work. Their findings have served as a useful contribution to this report.

4. Since the beginning of the year, the Department has itself begun a rigorous process of critical, internal examination, including a detailed study of the entire documentation and meetings chains that form the backbone of its work. The results of that examination are also reflected in the report. Throughout, careful attention has been paid to the priority areas for improvement identified by Member States, and ways and means to respond to those priorities have been considered. The results of these efforts are outlined below.

5. A five-pronged strategy has been developed to improve the Department's performance. The keys are:

(a) Repositioning the Department;

(b) Pursuing full-system benefits;

(c) Integrating global management;

(d) Optimizing the use of technology;

(e) Alleviating the documentation situation.

Repositioning the Department

6. The Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services occupies the workspace midway between the substantive contributions of the programme entities and the legislative outcomes of the intergovernmental machinery. Its role has been viewed as mainly that of a service provider. The Department takes great pride in its reliability, particularly when asked to deliver in the most adverse circumstances. This is a valuable asset for the uninterrupted functioning of the intergovernmental machinery of the Organization and must be nurtured. This approach has had other effects, however. Because the Department is intent on delivering, it has processed rapidly documents that are both submitted late and exceed, often egregiously, the established page limits. Because it values its reputation for dependability, it has traditionally accommodated requests for late-night meetings, weekend meetings and de facto extensions of meetings beyond approved durations. In short, the Department's work has been demand driven and it has measured its success on its ability to meet all demands, paying less attention to the resulting implications in terms of added cost, deteriorating quality, and inefficient use of staff time and effort. Acceptance of this demand-driven role was an underlying factor in the Department's exceeding its initial appropriation in New York by $11 million in the biennium 1998-1999 and by $27.6 million in the biennium 2000-2001.

7. Unwittingly, the Department is contributing to the creation of problems that affect the performance of the Organization. As long as it continues to process documents no matter how late they are delivered and

[1] See General Assembly resolution 56/242, section II, paras. 6 and 20; section III, paras. 1 and 13; and section IV, paras. 5, 7, 12 and 14; and resolution 56/253, paras. 80 and 84.

regardless of length, there is little incentive for author departments to submit documents on time and within defined page limits, and the product is bound to be of inconsistent quality. Or as long as meetings facilities are provided in excess of those originally programmed, there are few incentives for intergovernmental bodies to stick to normal meeting time, to manage their work programmes with discipline and foresight, and to conclude their work on time.

8. In the interests of the Organization as a whole, the Department will henceforth play a more proactive role that goes beyond that of a passive service provider. This larger role is as an active facilitator, seeking to help manage and contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the total process of intergovernmental activity. Performing proactive, facilitating functions in furtherance of intergovernmental objectives will require the Department to adjust its approach and its methods of work.

9. **Support to the President of the General Assembly.** The Department will intensify and broaden support to the President of the Assembly. It will initiate forward-planning arrangements well before the opening of the General Assembly session. Particularly in response to the early election of the President, it will coordinate the preparation of advice to the President on the work programme of the Assembly and seek to ensure the timely submission of relevant reports to the Assembly on the basis of the work programme.

10. **Secretaries of bodies and organs.** Committee secretaries, by the nature of their duties, already play a facilitating role. They will now work more proactively with Chairpersons and bureaux in planning agendas and programming the available time and in assisting in tracking document preparation. They will work closely with Chairpersons to make sure that meetings begin and end on time and that allocated meetings resources are fully utilized.

11. When it was established, the Department integrated the technical servicing secretariats of the General Assembly and its First to Fourth Committees, and the Economic and Social Council and all of its New York-based bodies. Now that the passage of time has proved the value of integrating these units with each other and with conference services, the Fifth and Sixth Committee technical servicing secretariats will be transferred to the Department.

12. **Documentation support.** The documentation units will operate in tandem with author entities to ensure improved advance planning. Waivers of the 16-page rule for reports originating in the Secretariat will be granted only when fully justified by exceptional circumstances. Subsidiary bodies will be reminded of and encouraged to respect the 20-page guideline for their reports.

13. **Editorial support.** Editors will make themselves available to contribute their technical advice prior to the submission of draft resolutions. They will also be available to authors at the drafting stage of a document's preparation to help ensure the quality and consistency of texts.

14. **Translation services.** Chiefs of translation services will offer advice to author entities on the readability of their texts. Concordance among languages in respect of draft resolutions will be done, where feasible, prior to their adoption. Regular contacts will be maintained with delegations to receive feedback on the quality of translation.

15. **Meetings programming.** In accordance with legislative mandates, the Department will administer the programme of meetings to comply strictly with the calendar of conferences and meetings approved by the General Assembly. Accordingly, with the exception of plenary meetings of the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, ad hoc meeting extensions beyond normal working hours will not be accommodated. Requests for sessions beyond authorized duration, or intersessional "informal consultations" which take the form of additional, unapproved sessions under another name, will be channelled for consideration through the Committee on Conferences in accordance with mandated arrangements. Statements of programme budget implications will be issued in such instances where required.

16. In the Department's own assessment of its work, a systemic approach was used to identify subprogrammes that add greater value to information as well as subprogrammes that add only marginal value, and on that basis to shift resources from the latter to the former. This will have the effect of increasing the overall productivity of the Department or gaining full-system benefits. This, together with other considerations as analysed in other sections of the

report, will result in the regrouping of activities and redeployment of resources. The structural adjustments involved are outlined in annex II.

17. The basic functions of the Department are hereby identified as the following:

(a) Supporting the intergovernmental machinery in the meeting rooms;

(b) Coordinating and planning the meetings and documentation processes;

(c) Processing documents;

(d) Printing and distribution of documents.

18. On the basis of these functions, the Department will be reorganized along the following lines:

(a) The Central Planning and Coordination Service;

(b) The General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division;

(c) The Meetings and Publishing Division;

(d) The Documentation Division.

19. In keeping with the broader and more active role that the Secretary-General expects the Department to play, it has been renamed "Department for General Assembly and Conference Management" (see figure).

Pursuing full-system benefits

20. The two main areas of work of the Department are providing meetings support and processing documentation. These two functions constitute a single cycle of work. In this cycle, meetings generate documents, which in turn are used in future meetings. The cycle is driven by the Member States through intergovernmental meetings. Nearly all the activities of United Nations organs and bodies, including the Security Council, are cyclical in nature.

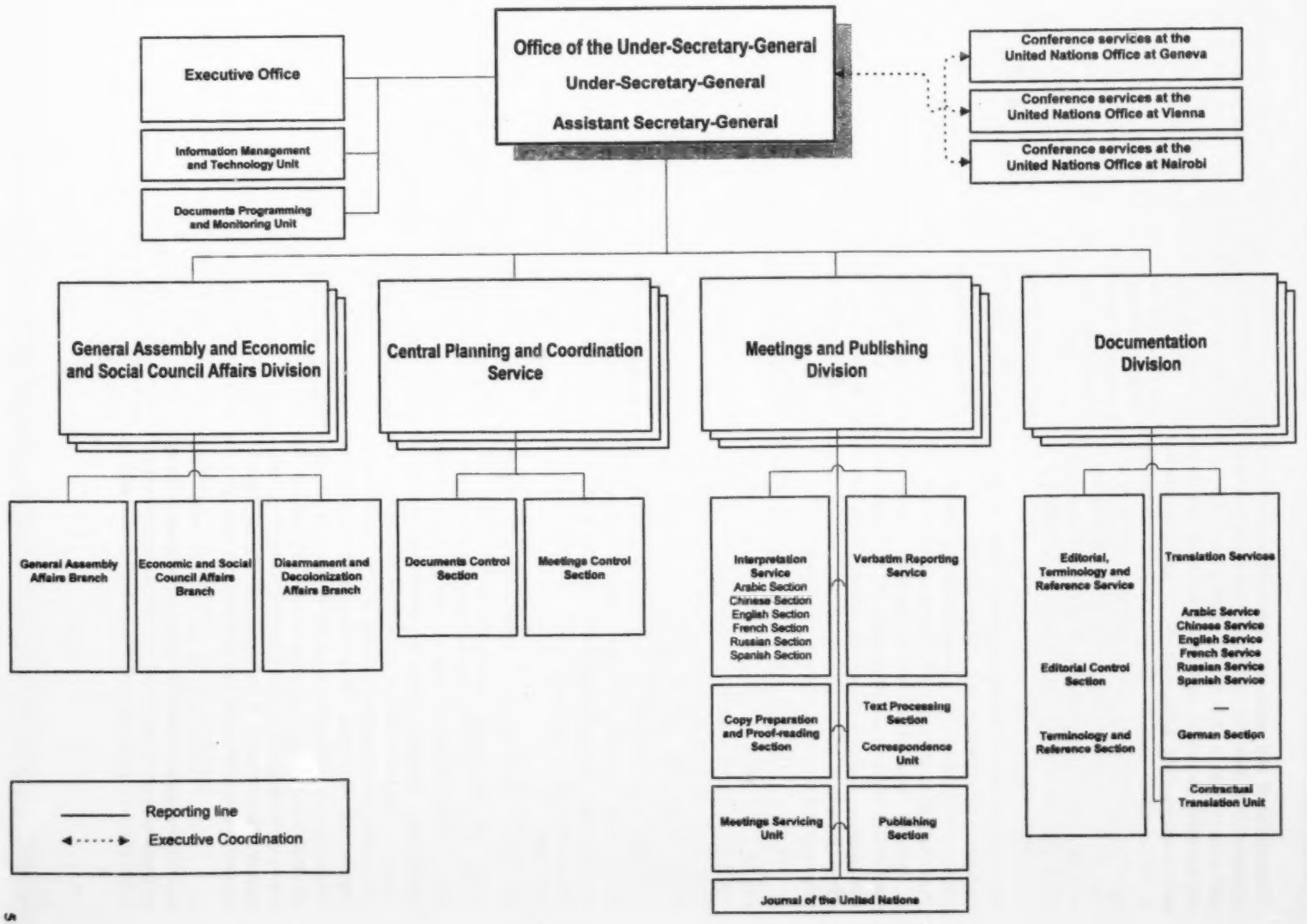
21. The Department's all-encompassing role in the cycle is to add value to information. The Department adds value to information in several ways, such as:

- Supporting intergovernmental bodies in planning and following their agendas, so that they will have the best information available to ensure smooth, procedurally correct and effective conduct of meetings.
- During meetings, helping intergovernmental bodies make the best use of information, so that they can effectively and efficiently achieve their objectives.
- Converting written information from drafts in one language into edited, official documents in six languages (and for some documents, seven), fully referenced, in consistent United Nations terminology.
- Converting spoken information from one language into up to six languages for the benefit of all Member States.
- Preserving the record of parliamentary debate where mandated (verbatim and summary records).
- Editing and publishing intergovernmental resolutions following adoption so that they are consistent in six languages.
- Making official information available to users in readable electronic and paper form.

22. In seeking to increase further the value added of its work, it is evident that structural changes alone will not be enough to improve the Department's performance; it is also necessary to change the culture of the Department. In this context, a major finding of the consultants is that the different units in the Department exist, and frequently function, in "silos" with little interaction between services except at the management level. It is also found that unit staff meetings are not held regularly. Staff have an insufficient picture of the whole production chain and of the overall policies framing their work. They do not appreciate the cost savings that others might achieve if they changed their own practices.

23. The Department, in fact, operates in crisis management mode. This has been a contributing factor to the silo mentality as units concentrate on the immediate tasks at hand. There could be cases where one work unit responds to the daily pressure of heavy workload by optimizing its own immediate performance through practices that make work more difficult for other work units, or that result in a less cost-effective work product. In a truly integrated department, managers and staff are not only planning and coordinating their efforts across work units, they are also thinking about how other work units and end users will use their products. This full-system thinking

Department for General Assembly and Conference Management



influences staff and managers' day-to-day choices of work practices; they will always try to choose practices that balance their internal performance with the performance of others and that result in the best performance by the whole system. A strong emphasis on full-system benefits is essential to capturing significant performance returns on new technology and other areas, and will lead end users of the Department's services — especially delegates of Member States — to notice that its, and the Secretariat's, performance has really improved.

24. The proactive facilitating efforts that will be undertaken in support of the intergovernmental process should contribute to doing away with the customary crisis management mode of operations. This will lay the ground for taking steps towards full-system functioning. Effective coordination and operational mechanisms are also necessary in order to achieve full-system benefits. The mechanisms described below will be established or enhanced for this purpose.

25. Closer interdepartmental coordination is the first priority. The head of the Department has always convened a weekly coordination meeting with heads of other Secretariat departments and offices during the main part of the General Assembly session. This meeting will now be held throughout the year, with expanded responsibilities. It will serve as a high-level coordinating mechanism to take a holistic approach to the planning of meetings and the related documentation programme in support of the intergovernmental machinery.

26. The Departmental Management Group, comprising the senior management and heads and deputy heads of programmes, and meeting on a weekly basis, will assume special responsibility for articulating, managing and implementing the full-system approach within the Department and concentrate on strategic planning of the work of the Department. The heads of conference services at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi will take part in these meetings on a monthly basis via teleconferencing. The head of the Department will also periodically convene an enlarged meeting of "chiefs" involving some 30 senior and middle-level managers.

27. A new Programming Group will be established under the auspices of the Management Group, made up of the line managers below the programme manager level who are responsible for the crucial operational decisions that have Department-wide impact. The Group will be charged with ensuring an integrated flow of work within the Department.

28. An internal, interactive web site will be maintained as an important means to inform staff of Department-wide developments with a view to fostering Department-wide thinking and a greater sense of departmental identity. It will also provide an open forum outside the formal hierarchy of the Department.

29. All units within the Department will be instructed to hold staff meetings regularly. Managers will be tasked with conveying fully information on policy and other developments within the Department.

30. No single measure or management mechanism will produce instant results. Taken together, however, it may be expected that the combined effect will progressively move the Department as a whole in the direction of the full-system thinking that is required.

Integrating global management

31. As a global organization, the United Nations must operate in a manner designed to make the most cost-effective use of the resources at its disposal worldwide. Conference service programmes are operational at Headquarters, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and the regional commissions. Among the major duty stations, New York accounts for 63 per cent of conference service resources, Geneva for 29 per cent, Vienna for 6 per cent and Nairobi for 2 per cent.

32. In its resolution 56/242, section II, paragraph 3, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, bearing in mind the recent organizational changes, to ensure that the Department was considered the appropriate executive authority to oversee, coordinate and enhance the global management and delivery of United Nations conference services, under the legislative authority of the General Assembly and through oversight and examination by the Committee on Conferences. This provision is consistent with the policy position outlined by the Secretary-General in section 2 (General Assembly affairs and conference services) of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, where it is stated: "The Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services is responsible for conference services in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and the related resources for conference services budgeted

under the present section. This arrangement allows for integrated management of the conference-servicing resources in the four duty stations with a view to achieving the efficient utilization of resources." (A/56/6 (Sect. 2), para. 2.5)

33. Although the current review has concentrated on the Department at Headquarters, attention will be paid to the performance of the other major duty stations in the context of furthering the goal of integrated global management. At present, the understanding of the Department's leadership role varies from duty station to duty station. Through revisions of the relevant Secretary-General's bulletins, clear and consistent guidelines will be drawn up with a view to operationalizing the role of the head of the Department as the senior official "responsible for conference services (meetings management activities) in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and the related resources ...". Action will also be taken to ensure that the institutional relationship between the Department and the other three duty stations is uniform and effectively supports the goal of integrated global management of the Department.

34. Coordination and cooperation between duty stations need to be strengthened to achieve the purposes of global management of conference services in a cost-effective manner. A proven practice is workload sharing. For interpretation, there will be continuing efforts to coordinate and plan the servicing requirements of Headquarters and the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi with a view to optimizing, from a system-wide perspective, the utilization of the four duty stations' staff resources. This will include bringing interpreters from other duty stations to provide support when this is less costly than using freelance interpreters. Translation workload sharing allows for texts to be transmitted to other duty stations for translation to take advantage of time differences and relieve work pressure. Although the major duty stations all operate under heavy work pressures and tight deadlines, this practice will be further explored.

35. Possibilities for working globally through distance work in the areas of remote interpretation and contractual translation will continue to be pursued. Remote interpretation has great promise and will be utilized, upon intergovernmental approval, once the remaining technical difficulties are overcome and the impact on the working conditions of interpreters has been carefully reviewed and taken into consideration. The current state of technology still does not permit its use because of vision and sound synchronization difficulties and unreliability of service. Progress in improving the technology will continue to be monitored and reported upon.

36. Expansion of distance work for translation is more immediately promising. The Department already utilizes this practice in two ways. It has ceased sending its translators to conferences since 1994 and all in-session translation work at conferences is done via faxing or electronic transmission to the major duty stations. It also employs freelance contractors based in their home countries on special contracts to handle documents with a long lead time. Through electronic transmission, more time-sensitive work can be sent to such contractors. In order to expand the pool it will be necessary to raise the rates offered. The existing pay scales for contractual translation have not changed since 1995, making the work increasingly unattractive to the pool of available contractual translators, particularly in face of competition from higher bidders. Proposals will be developed to introduce a new rate scale so that the corps of contractual translators may be expanded. This will actually lower overall costs and result in financial savings for the Organization, as it will reduce the perennial need to call in freelance translators.

37. For major conferences held outside duty stations, joint teams from different duty stations have worked well and reduced expenses for host countries. They will continue to be put together in the future with better advance planning.

38. Effective global management also requires identification of best practices, which can then be employed worldwide. It also requires consistent application of policies and procedures as befits an organization whose members expect to receive the same high quality of support at whichever United Nations duty station they may be. Other duty stations have much to contribute in identifying best practices. A review will be conducted of the current practices and procedures, after which it will be determined which should be applied globally and what allowance needs to be made to take account of local conditions.

39. In addition to those operational responsibilities, the Department's role in the area of budgeting and personnel would also be strengthened. The Under-

Secretary-General would determine the respective sharing of global conference-servicing resources for Headquarters, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, and receive, on a regular basis, analytical and detailed expenditure reports. The Under-Secretary-General will also be consulted and involved in the decision-making process for the filling of posts with significant conference-servicing functions at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. At the same time, day-to-day responsibility for administration of conference services at those three duty stations would continue to rest with the Directors-General concerned.

40. The Department will continue to expand the utilization of global conference-servicing resources through systematic and concerted advance planning among the four duty stations. The annual coordination meeting of conference services managers is expected to play a more effective role in this respect.

Optimizing the use of technology

41. Within the Department, technology used to be seen as one in an array of tools to be employed in the workplace. Given the nature of its work processes, the Department will henceforth employ information technology not merely as a tool but as a strategic asset.

42. Since the beginning of the year, a systematic, internal examination has been taking place of the Department's two work chains — document processing and meetings arrangements — in order to determine how and where information and communications technology could be introduced, upgraded or modified. While many of the Department's activities already make effective use of technology, the examination has revealed that substantial opportunities exist to take transformational steps to exploit the benefits of technological innovation to improve performance and, in time, to reduce costs. The most pressing challenge is with the documents work chain. Here, the decision has been taken to institute a system for complete electronic processing of documents from submission to reproduction and distribution. The purpose is to move information from work unit to work unit, and from person to person, in as high-value an electronic format as possible. When information is received by staff in the processing chain in an electronic format, this eases their work effort and enables them to produce higher quality work, thus contributing to higher full-system productivity.

43. A plan of action has now been initiated for complete electronic processing of documents. Once in place, author entities will submit documents in electronic form; documents will be logged in and their progress tracked through the Department's e-DRITS (Electronic Documents Registration Information and Tracking System), which will be upgraded; editors will pass on texts to translators electronically through on-screen editing or scanning; translators will work on screen either by typing or through voice recognition software (or translations submitted in the form of digital sound files), and the use of computer assisted translation (CAT) will be intensified and extended; text processors will return texts to translators and revisers electronically and will complete, format and submit texts for printing electronically; and the printing and distribution services will handle texts electronically.

44. On the meetings work flow side, a number of projects are planned. The *Journal of the United Nations* has been redesigned to encompass information on all activities taking place at Headquarters and to permit easier access to the United Nations web site. The new *Journal* will have on-line interactive capabilities, which will permit downloading of the documents listed.

45. **E-Meets,** a database for all meetings activities, is being set up. E-Meets will integrate the separate processes now used to plan, schedule and track meetings on an annual, monthly and daily basis. E-Meets will have multiple access levels, including one that lets Member States obtain essential information through the Extranet.

46. **Scrolling on-screen information** on the daily meetings programme with periodic updates will be displayed on the television screens already set up around Headquarters.

47. A number of projects are under consideration for enhancing the technological capabilities of the meeting rooms. It is planned to install two large projection screens with digital projectors in the Economic and Social Council and Trusteeship Council Chambers and the large conference rooms, and one projection screen with digital projectors in the medium and small conference rooms. The screens will be compatible with virtually any source — computers, Internet, LAN, power point, slides and films. Another project is for drop-down video monitors mounted in the ceilings of the galleries of the Economic and Social Council and

Trusteeship Council Chambers and the large conference rooms to project the image of speakers. A third project is for the installation of LAN access capabilities at each delegate position. A fourth is to provide individual small screen monitors in the interpreters' booths capable of displaying any image from any source and with access to the United Nations LAN. All these projects will generally be pursued in the context of the capital master plan, and implemented earlier whenever possible.

48. Implementation of the electronic document processing projects will have to proceed at differing speeds, in order to avoid disruption of services as far as possible. The aim will be to have the new system functioning by the end of the current biennium. The meetings-related projects will be operational by the end of 2002.

Alleviating the documentation situation

49. Documentation has been a chronic problem of the United Nations. It has worsened lately, to such an extent that the Organization is in danger of being overwhelmed by a flood of documents. In 2001, delegations received on average a set of 30 documents or 350 pages each working day, which meant a yearly total of 87,500 pages. Moreover, each Permanent/ Observer Mission received the number of sets of documents — ranging from one to 90 — it had requested.

50. Member States have increasing difficulty in absorbing and acting adequately upon the reports that reach them because of the sheer volume and late submission. The Secretariat, in terms of both the author entities and its processing arm, has increasing difficulty in providing reports of a consistently high quality and brevity as well as in good time for meetings. There is currently a growing shared frustration on the part of Member States and the Secretariat with the documentation situation that may be characterized in a single phrase — too many, too long and too late.[2]

51. It will take concerted efforts by all concerned to alleviate the problem. Member States need to exercise greater restraint in requesting reports from the Secretariat, special rapporteurs and experts. Author entities and other reporting bodies must truly endeavour to comply with the respective page limits and time frame for submission. The Department will do its part by intensifying efforts within the areas of its responsibilities as follows:

(a) Improving the system of document processing;

(b) Better advance planning;

(c) Establishing a slotting system for processing reports;

(d) Enforcing page limits;

(e) Replacing summary records;

(f) Introducing printing on demand.

52. **Improving the system of document processing.** Under the section of this report on optimizing the use of technology, the Department's plan to move to a system of complete electronic processing of documents is described. Once implemented, the new system will produce productivity gains for the process as a whole.

53. **Better advance planning.** Under the present system, author entities are requested to submit forecasts indicating when their reports will be submitted to the Department. The general pattern has been that forecasts for about 40 per cent of requested documents have been submitted and that most forecasts have been inaccurate. Advance planning for report submission and processing usually starts just a few months before reports are needed. As requests for reports and author responsibility for most reports are known as soon as the relevant bodies have concluded their consideration of the questions, valuable time is

[2] For the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, for example, 451 reports were submitted. Of that number, 71 per cent were submitted after the deadline of 3 July 2001. On average, the late documents were submitted with 74 days' delay. Statistics from the substantive session of 2001 of the Economic and Social Council indicate that 88 reports were submitted; 64 missed the deadline of 24 April 2001, and the late reports were submitted an average of 39 days late. Information gathered for the period 2000-2001 shows that 17 per cent of documents originating in the Secretariat exceeded the 16-page limit; these longer documents, however, accounted for 55 per cent of the workload for Secretariat documents. Similarly, just 13 per cent of major policy documents and reports originating outside the Secretariat exceeded 20 pages in length, but those documents comprised 68 per cent of the workload for non-Secretariat documents.

lost before concerted advance planning involving both author entities and the Department begins.

54. The Department will install a new system of improved advance upstream planning. It will encompass all reports that the Department is expected to process, including reports to the Security Council and the Fifth and Sixth Committees, which are not currently programmed. The new system will start with early, advance planning meetings involving author entities, Secretaries of bodies and relevant units of the Department. The planning process will begin immediately upon completion of a body's work; in the case of some Main Committees of the General Assembly that conclude their work relatively early, this would be before the end of the session. Through early information sharing, alert arrangements will be set up. When progress in document preparation appears to be lagging, early warning signals will be conveyed to the bureaux of committees, making possible scheduling adjustments to programmes of work.

55. **Establishment of a slotting system for report processing.** The current system of report forecasting and planning is based on the 10-week rule for the submission of reports by author entities for processing and the 6-week rule for the issuance of reports, both of which go largely unobserved. The Department has, in fact, previously drawn this to the attention of the Committee on Conferences and suggested that the rules be modified to reflect a more achievable target. Not only do author entities have difficulty complying with the 10-week rule[3] but the utility of a rule that requires the submission of documents weeks, sometimes months, before the opening of a body rather than when an item is taken up deserves reconsideration. If the vast majority of reports could be issued four weeks before a body is due to consider them, this would represent a substantial gain. The Department will now proceed to implement an entirely new system of document forecasting and planning with a view to ensuring that a high proportion of reports reach a body in good time before an item is to be considered. The system will be based on the assignment of submission "slots" for reports.

56. As soon as it is possible to do so, the Department will assign a "slot" of time — a window of one week — when the author entity should submit a report. The "slot" will be determined on the basis of the dates and programme of work of the session at which a report is to be considered and the time needed to produce the document at a high level of quality. The incentive for author entities to adhere to their time windows is that the Department would commit itself to issuing the report within a specific week so that it will be available four weeks before it is due to be considered. Documents that are not submitted within the allotted "slot" will lose processing priority. An important additional advantage of the new system is that it will reverse the present pattern, which gives few incentives to early submitters in a context where most documents are submitted late. Frequently, the need to deal expeditiously with high-priority reports submitted late delays the processing of documents submitted in accordance with the rules.

57. **Enforcing page limits.** As a result of reinforced instructions by the Secretary-General, the 16-page limit (7,200 words) on reports originating in the Secretariat is being applied systematically. Waivers to the rule are granted in only a limited number of cases. More attention must also be paid to the 20-page guideline (9,000 words) for reports of subsidiary bodies, special rapporteurs and the like, which account for a significant proportion of documents issued. Essentially, the 20-page limit will now serve as a guideline for all reports not falling within the 16-page limit. Since Secretariat officials often draft such reports, they will be required to strive for observance of the guideline.

58. **Replacing summary records.** Summary records are currently provided for various categories of bodies, including subsidiary bodies of principal organs (Security Council, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council), legal drafting bodies (International Law Commission and United Nations Commission on International Trade Law), treaty-monitoring bodies and meetings of the States parties to certain international conventions. The entitlement to summary records is generally set out in the rules of procedure of the body concerned.

59. Summary records are prepared by translators, who attend meetings as members of a team and take notes on the proceedings, which they later use to draft the summary. A summary record is drafted in one language (under present arrangements, English, French,

[3] To observe the "10-week rule", all reports prepared for consideration at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, even those scheduled for consideration at the latter part of the session, should have been submitted to the Department by 2 July 2002.

Spanish, and, to a much more limited extent, Russian) and subsequently translated into the other five official languages. While the drafting of the summary record is generally completed within a few days of the meeting, translation of summary records, considered to be post-session documentation, has lagged, owing to the pressure of higher-priority parliamentary work.

60. Summary records are now routinely issued months, if not years, after the meetings to which they relate. They have thereby ceased to have any value as a working tool that delegations can use in the course of a session to keep abreast of the discussion and prepare progress reports for their capitals. For these purposes, delegates have been forced to rely increasingly on their own notes and/or on press releases issued by the Department of Public Information.

61. In order for summary records to be issued in a reasonable time, it would be necessary to reinforce substantially the staffing of the six translation services or to provide considerable additional resources to cover the costs of external translation of summary records. The Department believes, however, that modern information technology provides another, low-cost option, namely, digital sound recordings of the proceedings of bodies made available in all six official languages on the United Nations web site or at specially equipped listening booths at the main conference centres where bodies entitled to summary records meet.

62. As a response to the General Assembly's request in resolution 56/242 that the Secretary-General take steps to remedy the late issuance of summary records, the Department proposes a study of the practical and cost implications of replacing summary records with such digital recordings and to report thereon through the Committee on Conferences.

63. **Introducing printing on demand.** Documents are printed, distributed and stored under three categories. The first is the daily distribution of documents to Missions and within the Secretariat called "initial distribution". The second involves storing of documents for "secondary distribution" in meeting rooms and upon the request of delegates and Secretariat staff. The third is the shipping of reports and publications outside Headquarters, including overseas.

64. The consultants' findings reveal that Missions and Secretariat staff receive many more hard copies than they use, although distribution is based on specific requests. In the first place, it should be possible to find out with greater accuracy how many copies in which categories are really needed of different types of document. Next, "Printing on demand" arrangements can be set up to provide documents which are additional to initial distribution either because they are in a category not normally required by a Mission or because more copies are needed. Printing on demand can be feasible for a good segment of the initial distribution for Missions choosing to participate in such an arrangement. In addition, the Department will work with interested Missions to demonstrate how they can use the ODS to download and print the documents they want.

65. Valuable staff effort and space is devoted to secondary distribution of documents both to Secretariat staff and to delegates who should already have them and to storage of documents that are available on the ODS. Storage and distribution costs for secondary distribution to Secretariat staff can be reduced substantially if staff are instructed to find the documents they need electronically. Delegations will naturally continue to require ready availability of documents for their use in meeting rooms. It should still be possible, however, to reduce the very large number of copies initially printed and set aside for secondary distribution and to utilize "Printing on demand" technology for certain categories of document for secondary distribution.

66. Unnecessary, costly, physical distribution and shipping tasks are performed, such as redistribution outside Headquarters of documents printed externally, and sending of documents by pouch or courier to distant duty stations. Documents printed externally that are intended for users outside Headquarters will, in future, be shipped directly to their intended recipients by the external printers, saving both distribution staff time and re-shipping costs. Distribution staff time and shipping costs will also be saved by eliminating pouch or courier shipments of documents to duty stations that have the capability to download and print their own copies from the ODS or other United Nations databases, as needed.

Conclusions

67. The actions outlined in the previous paragraphs require a profound change in the character of the Department and in its operations. The overall aim is to make a Department already working well in many respects perform even better. Whether it is pursuing full-system benefits or acting as a facilitator in all aspects of its work, shifting from a demand-driven approach to a better managed intergovernmental process, promoting the global utilization of conference-servicing resources, putting in place a modern mechanism for the complete electronic processing of documents, or taking serious steps to address the documentation situation, the Department has set for itself a serious and difficult agenda. Part of the agenda will involve resource adjustments, strengthening of some areas and reductions in others being achieved largely through greater application of information and communications technology. Consequential personnel shifts will occur but, through retraining and attrition, there will be no involuntary personnel departures. Overall, the changes will take time but, when completed, should make the Department a more responsive, productive, efficient and useful partner to Member States and substantive entities.

Annex I

Measuring productivity with the current workload standards

1. In its resolution 56/253, paragraph 80, the General Assembly noted with concern that productivity standards for interpreters had not been reviewed since 1974 and that workload standards and processes for translation had not changed substantially, as well as the complaints about the quality of the interpretation and translation. In paragraph 84 of that resolution, the Secretary-General was requested to submit a report on, inter alia, the production standards of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. This note responds to that request.

2. The Secretariat, like most United Nations organs and bodies, established workload standards for internal planning and budgeting purposes and in order to monitor performance. At present there are only three categories of staff with explicit workload standards: interpreters, translators and text processors. The current standards measure quantitative outputs only.

Interpreters

3. The workload standard for the interpreters was set over two decades ago. It is a partial measurement. For interpreters who do simultaneous interpretation for all official meetings, the official standard is no longer than three hours in one stretch; this has been supported by many medical studies over the years. The contract with the interpreters association is pegged to this workload standard for the next four years. The standard assignment is seven three-hour segments per week with at least two hours' break between the segments. Other activities of interpreters include preparing glossaries, reading background documents, and assisting in preparing examinations for recruiting new interpreters. Time performing these tasks is not tracked.

Translators

4. The daily workload standards for the United Nations translators are 1,650 words for translation subject to revision, 1,815 words for self-revised translation and 3,960 words for revision. The workload standards were re-evaluated in the 1998-1999 budget process and approved by the General Assembly. The standards are the same for all the duty stations. The present workload standards for translators are also partial measurements. They do not take into account the quality of the work accomplished, the level of difficulty of the work, and other assignments (terminological identification, learning new technologies, contributing to setting language examinations, assessing potential external translators and drafting summary records). The chiefs of the language services are responsible for gauging the difficulty of different texts, the distribution of work in their units and the strengths of the translators, and assigning the work accordingly.

5. All translators now have a computer, but different language areas have different practices in terms of working on screen, from 80 per cent for English and 70 per cent for Chinese to 8 per cent for Spanish and 0.5 per cent for Russian. Arabic is at 25 per cent and French at 35 per cent. (The German Translation Section, financed by a trust fund, is at 100 per cent.) Surveys have found that the advantages of on-screen translation are not necessarily related to increased productivity, which may be lower initially, but rather to increased flexibility and satisfaction, and greater consistency through the use of on-line glossaries and databases.

6. The three most productive language sections in terms of words per day per translator (Arabic, Russian, Spanish) also have the lowest technology use. Understandably, they are reluctant to change their work practices, and adequate software tools do not yet exist for Arabic and Russian. The effect of their manner of working is externalized to the text-processing units for those languages, however, which have by far the highest overtime costs.

7. There has been no major breakthrough in technology for automated translation in the past 30 years. The current systems for automated translation are not acceptable to translators the world over, except in very narrow technical fields. The greatest gains in translation productivity have come from managing the whole workflow of translation electronically and the reuse of previous translations through computer assisted translation. Regardless of what tool is used by the translator, translation, like interpretation, is first and foremost intellectual work. The productivity gains to be expected from the use of technology at the individual level, although sometimes significant, are

not as important as the efficiencies that are realized when the whole workflow of translation is managed electronically.

Text processing

8. The staff in text processing meet their workload standards of 1,200 words per hour of typing, but that does not take account of the other tasks they do, such as preparing charts and graphics, incorporating editorial corrections into texts, reformatting, proof-reading incoming electronic texts, and an increasing amount of desktop publishing. The ratio of translator to text processor now stands between 1.3 to 1 and 1.5 to 1, depending on the language section. The productivity gains made by the electronic flow of documents should increase that ratio and shift the work of text processors to the more complex tasks of proof-reading, formatting and desktop publishing. The workload standard for text processors should be reviewed to take into account the different levels of complexity of task assigned.

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9. The workload standards are only a partial measure of the contributions of staff and should not be regarded as a comprehensive measure of productivity. It would be more meaningful to focus on measures of satisfaction with outcomes and total cost efficiencies. It may be better to develop full-system performance measures and focus more on those measures and not simply on individual work standards. In general, the utility of measuring intellectual work by industrial standards deserves re-evaluation.

10. Ultimately, the outcome of good performance by the Secretariat is the effectiveness of United Nations bodies in achieving their purposes. That may be, by itself, too broad a notion for assessing the performance of interpreters, translators and text processors. Using feed-back mechanisms as supplements to measure performance would help to give a more accurate assessment of the way the Department, by providing high quality services that satisfy delegates and respond to their needs, providing timely documents, edited and faithfully translated, in all the official languages, and managing meetings services at a reasonable cost, helps United Nations bodies to achieve their goals.

Annex II

Streamlining the structure of the Department

Making information technology a strategic asset

1. The repositioned Department for General Assembly and Conference Management will make technology a strategic asset for achieving a higher level of performance. The Information Management and Technology Unit will move from the Executive Office and report directly to the Office of the Under-Secretary-General. The Unit will be strengthened to enable it to provide a full range of information and communications technology services, such as systems analysis, programming and support, as well as hardware and software procurement, installation and maintenance.

Strengthening the documentation function

2. In order to raise the profile of the advance documentation planning function, to expand its area of responsibility, and endow it with a status so that it can act authoritatively, the Documents Planning and Monitoring Unit, currently placed in the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division, will be relocated to report directly to the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and will be strengthened. Because of its present location within a Division mandated to service only the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary bodies, the Unit has not supported advance planning for all reports. Reports to the Security Council, for example, have not been within its purview. All reports processed by the Department will now be programmed. The Unit will take responsibility for the advance, upstream documentation planning and monitoring functions, as well as for the new document slotting system.

Grouping meetings support functions

3. In order to concentrate the meetings support services in a single programme, the operational component of the Planning and Meetings Servicing Section (conference officers) and the *Journal* unit will be relocated to the Meetings and Publishing Division. This Division will now include, on the meetings side, the following functions: interpretation, verbatim reporting, meetings servicing and documentation assistance (conference officers and meeting servicing assistants) and the *Journal*, thereby achieving a synergetic consolidation.

Strengthening and integrating editorial support functions

4. Most texts that are translated are subject to editing. The faster texts are edited, the faster the overall documentation process will become. To facilitate the process, a new Editorial Terminology and Reference Service will be established by integrating the Editorial Control Section and the Terminology and Reference Section, to provide editors and translators with fully referenced texts and consistent terminology. The editing function in the new Service will be substantially strengthened through redeployment of some editors from the former Official Records Editing Section. The concordance of the different language versions of draft resolutions will now be performed, prior to their adoption, by editors/translators redeployed from the Official Records Editing Section to the Translation Services, where they will also increase the overall translation capacity.

Merging the reproduction and distribution functions

5. There are opportunities to rationalize some functions of the Distribution Section that do not provide optimal benefits, and to reassign others. The Department will look into adopting new "Smart printing" or "Printing on demand" technologies that will positively affect distribution.

6. There are synergies between printing and distribution (e.g., in document scanning and sorting) that can be achieved. Uniting the two operations, which are so closely linked, will increase the possibility for efficiencies and savings in staff effort and space. Accordingly, the Reproduction and Distribution Sections will be merged and form a Publishing Section.